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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

11 JUN 1975

Honorable Donald J. Mitchell
House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Mr. Mitchell:

Thank you for your inquiry regarding the article by Mr. Sam Adams in the May 1975 issue of Harper's magazine. I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide my views on this matter.

In broad terms, Mr. Adams charges that the Central Intelligence Agency deliberately suppressed Mr. Adams' views of enemy troop strength in South Vietnam, and conspired with elements of the Department of Defense to produce false and misleading, but politically acceptable, estimates of Vietnamese Communist strength.

These charges are not true.

During the period discussed in Mr. Adams' article, U. S. intelligence analysts of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troop strength were continually confronted with the basic problem of fragmentary evidence. The evidence available consisted largely of captured Communist documents and the results of prisoner interrogations, augmented by informant and agent reports. Evidence which looked solid on first inspection was often much less solid than initial appearances would suggest. (Communist officials reporting to higher command echelons, for example, frequently exaggerated their accomplishments in developing guerrilla units, recruiting people for front groups or service units, etc.) Also, the evidence was inherently spotty. Hard information on Communist strength in several districts, for example, had to be assessed along with other information in determining the extent to which these districts were--or were not--representative of the approximately 235 districts in all of South Vietnam.

Given the state and nature of the evidence available, there were--inevitably--wide variations in the assessments or conclusions on this subject developed by professional U. S. intelligence officers. All of these conclusions had some evidentiary basis and none of them--including Mr. Adams'--was beyond legitimate professional argument.

By Mr. Adams' own account, his views could hardly have been considered suppressed. Indeed, he was afforded unusual opportunities to present them to his fellow analysts throughout the intelligence community

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and to the most senior officers in the CIA. In addition, Mr. Adams was able to expound his views during a number of major attempts to resolve the differences within the U. S. intelligence community regarding the size and strength of Communist forces in Vietnam. These attempts included interagency conferences held in Honolulu, Saigon and Washington, attended not only by representatives of the Washington intelligence community, but also by representatives of CINCPAC and MACV. Mr. Adams also presented his views to various members of the National Security Council Staff, to several Congressmen, and to members of the staffs of either individual Congressmen or various congressional committees.

Mr. Adams' research in fact made a real contribution to our knowledge of enemy strength in South Vietnam and the results of that research did much to raise the United States Government's estimates of that strength. Nonetheless, not all of Mr. Adams' conclusions were endorsed by his colleagues or superiors, not because his views were suppressed or regarded as politically unpalatable, but simply because the detailed expositions of his arguments were not all persuasive to his professional colleagues.

The Agency's assessments in the late 1960's were based in substantial measure on Mr. Adams' work and did argue the case for higher figures than those employed by MACV and the Defense Intelligence Agency. These CIA assessments were presented to the most senior officials of the United States Government, who were also apprised of the fact that there remained substantial differences of opinion within the intelligence community on these questions of Communist strength.

Mr. Adams' charges go to the very heart of the intelligence profession. One of the principal reasons why Congress established an independent Central Intelligence Agency in 1947 was to prevent departmental concerns and policy considerations from influencing national intelligence assessments. On the complex matter of assessing Communist strength in Vietnam, we scrupulously avoided consideration of the political impact of our judgments and constantly endeavored to provide the President and his senior advisors with the most objective conclusions we could develop, based on the best evidence and analysis attainable.

During 1968, two internal investigations were conducted within CIA to assess charges made at that time by Mr. Adams which were essentially similar to those expounded in his 1975 Harper's article. On the basis of the findings of those two inquiries, I am personally satisfied that Mr. Adams had every reasonable opportunity to present his views and argue them in great detail; that the Agency officers who did not accept all of his conclusions were acting in light of their best professional reading of the evidence available--which led them to conclusions at some variance with those of

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Mr. Adams--and that the CIA officers and offices responsible for assessing the situation in Vietnam carried out their responsibility for producing unbiased intelligence assessments.

Sincerely,
/s/ W. E. Colby

W. E. Colby
Director

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